

Critical Legislation for the Fall Agenda

With less than 20 legislative days scheduled for the remainder of the year, there are a number of critical issues that Congress should take action on immediately. Unfortunately, according to a recent Politico report, “GOP leaders are struggling to come up with an agenda to fill the 19 legislative days that are left in 2013.” [[Politico, 10/27](#)] Here’s a look at some of the essential pieces of legislation that Congress should be addressing before the end of the year:

JOB CREATION

- According to a poll earlier this month, 22% of Americans think “creating jobs is the most important way for the federal government to improve the economy” [[Gallup, 10/14/13](#)].
- While Republicans’ policy of governing by crisis has led to economic uncertainty and the loss of jobs, Democrats are committed to growing our economy and creating jobs with legislation including House Democrats’ Make It In America plan.
- Congress has been in session for 116 days in the 113th Congress, but House Republicans have refused to bring forward comprehensive job creation legislation.

COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

In July, the Senate passed a bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill, but House Republican leadership refuses to bring forward similar legislation. This legislation would strengthen border security, create a pathway to citizenship, and boost our economy.

- The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that the Senate bill would reduce the deficit by \$843 billion over the next two decades [[Congressional Budget Office, 7/3/13](#)]
- A Fox News poll showed that 76% of Americans think it’s important to pass major immigration reform legislation this year, with 74% in favor of “finding a way for the 11 million illegal immigrants already in the country to remain -- and eventually become citizens -- if they meet certain requirements” [[Fox News, 6/13/13](#)]
- H.R. 15, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act, is cosponsored by 187 House Democrats, with a growing number of Republicans supporting efforts to move forward with immigration reform legislation:

Congressman Jeff Denham (R-CA): “We can’t afford any more delays. ... I support an earned path to citizenship to allow those who want to become citizens to demonstrate a commitment to our country, learn English, pay fines and back taxes and pass background checks.” [[CNN, 10/27/13](#)]

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL): “It’s important to keep the conversation going in trying to fix the broken immigration system. I favor any approach that will help us move the negotiations forward,” [[The Hill, 10/29/13](#)]

Republican Conference Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA): “I believe that we have a window here between now and the end of the year and that this is a priority. ... We must pass immigration reform. It’s a priority for Republicans, for Democrats. There’s a recognition that it’s

important to America. It's important to our economy. America has long been the land of immigrants.”
[[POLITICO, 10/5/13](#)]

Congressman Trent Franks (R-AZ): “I’d like to see a single pathway to citizenship for everyone, that no one would be blocked from, unless they do something criminal...and I’d like to make sure that we have clear border security...And, of course, I’d like to see the whole immigration code simplified and rewritten so that somebody besides God could understand it ... I believe the issue will come to the floor and I support bringing it to the floor,” [[Arizona Republic, 10/26/13](#)]

Congressman Joe Heck (R-NV): “There is a clear, bipartisan consensus among House members that immigration reform is the right thing to do both for people in this country and for our economy ... There are bills that have passed Committee that could be brought to the floor next week, but the House Republican leadership may punt the issue until 2014 for political reasons. That's very disappointing.”
[[Heck.House.gov, 10/25/13](#)]

Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA): “There are plenty of bipartisan efforts underway and in discussion between members on both sides of the aisle to try and address what is broken about our immigration system. The committees are still working on this issue, and I expect us to move forward this year in trying to address reform and what is broken about our system.” [[House Floor, 10/23/13](#)]

Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL): “I would like to get [immigration reform] done this year.”
[[NBC Latino, 9/28/13](#)]

FARM BILL

- The farm bill expired on September 30, and a conference committee is beginning negotiations this week.
- Already, \$5 billion in federal SNAP funding to states will expire on Friday, which will hurt struggling families that receive assistance from this program, according to the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#).
- A farm bill should include a responsible level of funding for nutrition assistance programs, rejecting the House bill’s proposed almost \$40 billion cut to SNAP funding that will impact low-income families, including thousands of veterans, according to the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#).
- House Republicans have recognized the need for urgent action on the farm bill:

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-OK): “[I]f there's one of many, many things we agree on it is getting farm bill calendar year 2013 signed into law.” [[Agri-pulse, 10/23/13](#)]

Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK): “My hope at the end of this process, because I think it’s always where you have wanted to be, is that we have a bipartisan vote in favor of this bill coming out of conference. I just urge you to bring it back to us before the end of the year, sooner is better. Let’s not run out of time on this one.” [[POLITICO, 10/12/13](#)]

VOTING RIGHTS ACT

In June, the Supreme Court struck down key provisions of the Voting Rights Act. Congress must respond to the Supreme Court’s ruling and re-write the preclearance formula that protects voters in states and local jurisdictions with a history of discrimination and voter suppression. Republican leaders have supported immediate action on this critical legislation:

Office of Democratic Whip Steny H. Hoyer, 10/30/13

Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA): “I’m hopeful Congress will put politics aside... and find a responsible path forward that ensures that the sacred obligation of voting in this country remains protected.” [[POLITICO, 6/25/13](#)]

Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI): “I am committed to restoring the Voting Rights Act as an effective tool to prevent discrimination. This is something that has to be done by the end of the year so that a revised and constitutional Voting Rights Act is in place by the 2014 elections — both the primaries and general election.” [[The Hill, 9/2/13](#)]

EXPIRING LEGISLATION

Several critical pieces of legislation are scheduled to expire on December 31, 2013 without action by Congress. These issues help working families, encourage economic growth, and provide essential services for Americans. Congress should take action immediately to address these items:

Permanently Fix the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR)

- On January 1, 2014, millions of seniors could lose access to their Medicare physicians without an update to the Medicare physician payment rates.
- In May, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office announced that it was slashing the price of a 10-year fix to \$139 billion, nearly half of previous estimates, partly because of a slowdown in the nation's Medicare spending. [[CBO, 5/14/13](#)]
- Physicians could face a 24.4% SGR cut in 2014 without Congressional action. [[American Medical News, 9/2/13](#)]

Unemployment Insurance

- Without an extension of the Emergency Unemployment Compensation program, last extended in the fiscal cliff deal, millions of Americans unemployed through no fault of their own will lose their Unemployment Insurance on January 1, 2014.
- Unemployment insurance served “as an automatic economic stabilizer by supporting consumer spending when recipients’ income fell, which in turn boosted aggregate economic activity,” according to a Congressional Budget Office report [[CBO, 4/1/13](#)]
- The CBO expects that “output and employment will be higher in the fourth quarter of 2013 than if those programs had expired” at the end of 2012, and that GDP is expected to be 0.2 percent higher as a result. [[CBO, 4/1/13](#)]

Tax Extenders

- Individual tax provisions scheduled to expire include deductions for teachers’ out-of-pocket expenses, state and local sales taxes, qualified tuition and related expenses, and mortgage insurance premiums.
- Renewable energy and energy efficient tax credits are also scheduled to expire.
- Dragging out an extension of these tax provisions, set to expire on December 31, 2013, only adds more uncertainty for families and businesses planning for the next year and beyond.

Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)

- TAA provides critical job training and worker assistance that helps strengthen the American workforce to be better equipped and more competitive.
- The current program (from 2011) provides a \$575 million investment in worker training.
- Participation by import-impacted U.S. firms in the Trade Adjustment Assistance for Firms (TAAF) program resulted in a 5 to 6% increase in firm sales and had an effect of a 4% increase in productivity. [[U.S. Government Accountability Office \(GAO\), 9/13/12](#)]